The New Creation

2/26/61

NOTHING IS QUITE AS ENLIGHTENING AND ILLUMINATING AS THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF EXAMINATION. ANIMALS CANNOT DO THIS, THEIR BEHAVIOR IS JUST THE PHYSICAL RESPONSE TO CERTAIN DRIVES, AND HAVING DONE SOMETHING IT IS DONE, AN ANIMAL CANNOT LOOK BACK AT [redacted] AND EVALUATE IT. WE, AS HUMANS, ARE FORTUNATE THAT IT IS WITHIN OUR POWER TO STAND OFF AND TAKE A LOOK AT OURSELVES, AND DECIDE WHETHER WHAT WE SEE IS GOOD OR BAD. AS MEMBERS OF THE DYER UNION CHURCH AND AS PROFESSED CHRISTIANS I WANT YOU TO DO THIS THIS MORNING: AND AS YOUR MEASURING STICK USE THE TEXT FOR THIS MORNING FROM PAUL'S LETTER TO THE GALATIANS: "NEITHER CIRCUMCISION COUNTS FOR ANYTHING NOR UNCIRCUMCISION, BUT A NEW CREATION."

THE QUESTIONS WE MUST ASK AS WE STAND OFF AND LOOK AT OURSELVES ARE NOT EASY TO ANSWER, SOME OF THEM ARE EVEN UNPLESANT TO THINK ABOUT. WHAT ARE WE DOING HERE? WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE DYER UNION CHURCH? WHAT IS MY ROLE IN THE CHURCH? AM I TRULY A CHRISTIAN? LATER ON IN THIS YEAR OUR CHURCH IS GOING TO ASK THESE QUESTIONS TO ITSELF IN A CHURCH WIDE CHRISTIAN ENLISTMENT PROGRAM. EACH OF YOU WILL BE CALLED ON TO CONSIDER THESE QUESTIONS AND TO ANSWER THEM PERSONALLY. TODAY I WANT YOU TO BEGIN THINKING ABOUT THEM, TODAY BEGIN A YEAR OF SELF EXAMINATION AND SCRUTINY.

FIRST LET'S STAND OFF AND TAKE A LOOK AT OUR CHURCH. I FIND IT HARD TO BE PLEASED AS I STAND OFF AND SCRUTINIZE OBJECTIVELY THIS GROUP OF PEOPLE. FOR ME AS YOUR

MINISTER AND FOR YOU AS MEMBERS WHAT WE SEE FROM THE OUTSIDE LOOKING IN IS NOT A BIT COMFORTING. THE DYER UNION CHURCH HAS ON ITS ROLLS APPROXIMATELY 80 NAMES, PEOPLE WHO HAVE PROMISED BEFORE GOD AND THEIR FELLOW CHRISTIANS TO LEAD NEW LIVES, TO DO ALL IN THEIR POWER TO DISCOVER GOD'S WILL FOR THEIR LIVES AND TO DO IT, TO PARTICIPATE RESPONSIBLY AND INTELLIGENTLY IN THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST WHICH IN THIS INSTANCE HAS CALLED ITSELF THE DYER UNION PROTESTANT CHURCH. AND YET ON A SUNDAY MORNING ONLY HALF THAT NUMBER FIND IT NECESSARY TO COME AND WORSHIP THEIR CREATOR. OUR AVERAGE ~~XXXXX~~ ATTENDANCE IS WELL BELOW HALF OF THE CHURCH MEMBERSHIP. TO AN OUTSIDER LOOKING IN THIS IS NOT AT ALL IMPRESSIVE.

IN A GLANCE ONE CAN SEE THAT ALL ASPECTS OF THE CHURCH'S LIFE ARE PLAGUED BY THIS LACK OF ENTHUSIASM. I CALL YOUR ATTENTION TO THE ACTIVITIES OF THIS PAST WEEK. ON WED. EVENING FIVE PEOPLE PARTICIPATED IN OUR FIRST LENTEN SERVICE. FIVE OUT OF EIGHTY THOUGHT IT NECESSARY TO SPEND AN EXTRA HOUR IN CHURCH IN THE MOST SACRED TIME OF THE YEAR. FORTY PERSONS SAT OUT THERE LAST SUNDAY AND HEARD ME PREACH FOR TWENTY MINUTES ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LENTEN SEASON. OF THOSE FORTY, FIVE RESPONDED. ON THURSDAY WE HELD THE FIRST CHOIR REHEARSAL FOR THE EASTER SEASON--FOUR LADIES ATTENDED, AT 7:30 THE SAME EVENING THE MEN'S FELLOWSHIP

HELD ITS MONTHLY MEETING, AND OUT OF ALL THE MEN IN THE CHURCH, SIX ATTENDED, ONE MORE THAN LAST MONTH. IT IS NOT A POPULAR OR ACCEPTED THING TO DO TO TALK FINANCES FROM THE PULPIT, BUT THIS AREA TOO SERVES AS A MIRROR OF THE SERIOUSNESS WITH WHICH WE TAKE OUR ENDEAVOR HERE. SPEAKING ONLY IN TERMS OF AVERAGES, OUR MEMBERSHIP CONTRIBUTED ON THE AVERAGE OF $1.15 PER WEEK IN THE LAST YEAR. THE BIBLE SUGGESTS TITHING, WE GIVE APROX. 1/100 OF OUR EARNINGS TO THE LORD. EVEN THESE FIGURES ARE MISLEADING BECAUSE HERE, AS IN ALL THE OTHER AREAS OF OUR CHURCH'S LIFE, A FEW ARE CARRYING THE LOAD.

WHAT ARE WE DOING HERE? ARE WE FULFILLING OUR RESPONSIBILITIES? I WILL BE YOUR PASTOR FOR ABOUT THREE MORE YEARS BARRING ANY UNFORESEEN EVENTS, AND AT THIS POINT I WOULD LIKE TO KNOW WHETHER YOU, AS A CHURCH, AND INDIVIDUALLY, ARE REALLY SERIOUS ABOUT CHRISTIANITY. THE QUESTION WE MUST ANSWER IN EXAMING OURSELVES, THE QUESTION PUT TO US BY PAUL'S CLAIM OF A NEW CREATION IS JUST THIS. ARE WE PART OF THIS NEW CREATION? ARE WE NEW BEINGS BECAUSE OF JESUS CHRIST? IF WE MUST ANSWER THIS QUESTION IN THERMS OF OUTWARD APPEARANCE THEN THE DYER UNION CHURCH IS NO MORE THAN A SUNDAY MORNING SOCIAL CLUB.

THE QUESTION ARISES AT THIS POINT AS TO THE NATURE OF THIS NEW CREATION. JUST WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN? WHAT IS THIS NEW BEING THAT WE ARE SUPPOSED TO BECOME HAVING ACCEPTED CHRIST AS LORD AND SAVIOR?

PAUL WAS CONFRONTED WITH THE SAME QUESTION. SHORTLY AFTER THE DEATH AND RESURREC*
TION OF OUR LORD TWO SEPARATE AND DISTINCT WINGS OF CHRISTIANITY AROSE. THE JEWISH
WING WITH ITS HEADQUARTERS IN JERUSALEM WAS LEAD BY PETER AND JAMES THE BROTHER
OF JESUS. THIS GROUP INTERPRETED THE GOSPEL STRICTLY IN TERMS OF THE OLD COMMUNITY
OF ISRAEL. THE MESSIAH HAD COME TO THE CHOSEN PEOPLE AS THEIR REDEEMER AND ANYONE
WHO WANTED TO BE A CHRISTIAN HAD EITHER TO ALREADY BE A JEW OR BECOME AS ASSIMILATED
TO JUDAISAM AS POSSIBLE. THIS ISSUE CENTERED IN THE RITE OF CIRCUMCISION. CIRCUMCISION IS T
THE OUTWARD MARK OF ONE OF GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE AND THE NEWLY INITIATED GENTILE CHRISTIAN
HAD TO SUBMIT TO THIS AS THE PREREQUISITE TO HIS ADMISSION TO THE COMMUNITY.

IN OPPOSITION TO THIS GROUP CALLED JUDAIZER'S WAS THE WING LED BY PAUL. PAUL
FROM THE BEGINNING SAW THAT THE CHRIST WAS THE SAVIOR OF ALL MANKIND AND WAS NOT
THE PRIVATE PROPERTY OF THE JEWS. HE CARRIED THE GOSPEL TO PAGANS, ROMANS, GREEKS
JEWS AND GENTILES ALIKE.

THE ISSUE WAS VERY CRUCIAL AT THE TIME SO WHEN PAUL WROTE "NEITHER CIRCUMCISION NOR
UNCIRCUMCISION IS IMPORTANT HIS READERS KNEW EXACTLY WHAT HE MEANT.

PAUL'S INTERPRETATION OF CHRISTIANITY IS ONE WE DO WELL TO EXAMINE, FOR IN IT IS

THE KEY TO AN UNDERSTANDING OUR PROBLEM TODAY. FOR PAUL, CHRISTIANITY WAS NOT ANOTHER RELIGION TO BE COMPARED AND WEIGHED AGAINST THE OTHER RELIGIONS OF THE DAY. AS A MATTER OF FACT HIS CONCEPT OF THE THING THAT HAD HAPPENED IN JESUS CHRIST COULD NOT EVEN BE CALLED RELIGION AT ALL. IT WAS A NEW CREATION, A NEW WAY OF LIFE, A NEW WAY OF THINGS THAT IS ALL ENCOMPASSING/ENVELOPING ALL OF EXISTENCE, A NEW BEING. THE CHURCH AS SUCH, WAS IMPORTANT ONLY AS IT SHARED IN AND ~~XX~~ PROMOTED THIS NEW WAY OF LIFE. CHRISTIANITY IS NOT AN END IN ITSELF BUT ONLY THE SUPER STRUCTURE OUT OF WHICH CAN PROCEED A NEWNESS, A NEW WAY OF LIVING. CIRCUMCISION OR UNCIRCUMVIDION WHAT DID IT MATTER? WHAT WAS IMPORTANT WAS THAT A PERSON BECOME A NEW PERSON: WHEN THE CHURCH BECOMES ONLY A STAGNANT LIST OF MEMBERX, JUST ONE PORTION OF LIFE OUT OF MANY IT IS NO LONGER THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST. BY ITS NATURE ~~THE CHURCH~~ CHRISTIANITY MUST BE A NEW COMMUNITY, COMPOSED OF PEOPLE WHO ARE NEW BEINGS BECAUSE OF JESUS CHRIST.

HOW, WE ASK DO WE BECOME NEW BEINGS AND PARTICIPATE IN THIS NEW CREATION? PAUL'S ANSWER IS CONSISTENT WITH HIS WHOLE SYSTEM. OUT OF THE OLD WAY OF LIVING, OUT OF THE OLD YOU MUST COME SOMETHING NEW AND STARTLING FRESH, A COMPLETELY NEW BEING. SOMEWHERE ALONG THE LINE A METAMORPHOSIS MUST OCCUR, A LIGHT SHINES IN THE DARKNESS,

THE RISEN CHRIST MUST LIVE IN THE DEPTHS OF A PERSONS LIFE. THE CHANGE IN PAUL'S LIFE WAS A CATACLYSMIC AND DRAMATIC INCIDENT AND OUT OF THE OLD, A STRICT JEW WHOSE LIFE WAS DEDICATED TO STAMPING OUT THE YOUNG CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT, CAME SOMETHING ENTIRELY NEW, A LIFE SO FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT AND PRESENCE OF HIS LORD THAT PAUL COULD RIGHTLY SAY, "IT IS NO LONGER IT THAT LIVE, BUT CHRIST WHO LIVES IN ME." MOST OF US ARE NOT AS FORTUNATE AS PAUL, WE HAVE BEEN BORN INTO CHRISTIANITY, GROWN UP ON IT AND EVENTUALLY TAKEN OUR PLACES AS MEMBERS OF A CHURCH. BUT, WE STILL MUST ENCOUNTER A CHANGE, WE MUST, IN THE COMMON TERMINOLOGY, BE BORN AGAIN.

AT THIS POINT THERE IS MUCH DISPUTE. OUT OF THE N.T. COMMAND " YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN" HAS COME THE IDEA THAT ALL CONVERSION EXPERIENCES ARE DRAMATIC, ON THE SPOT OCCASIONS. EVENGELISTS SHOUT AND POUND THE PULPIT, THEY DRAW VIVID PICTURES OF THE TORTUE IN ETERNAL FLAMES, THEY DO ALL IN THEIR POWER TO SCARE THEIR LISTENERS AND THEN AT THE PROPER TIME OFFER THE XXXXX SOLUTION/PAINTING EQUALLY VIVID PICTURES OF A LIFE IN HEAVENLY MANSIONS, OF ETERNAL BLISS SPENT BEHIND PEARLY GATES./ WHO CAN RESIST?/ MANY A CHRISTIAN CAN POINT TO THE VERY DAY, THE EXACT MINUTE AT WHICH THEY WERE SAVED,/SOME ARE CONVERTED DURING THE THIRD VERSE OF A SPECIFIC HUMN: OTHERS ARE FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT IN A FIT OF SPASTIC, ORGISTIC EMOTION. A GOOD EVAN* GELIST, WITH A BAG OF TRICKS AND THE PROPER KNOWLEDGE OF MOB PSYCHOLOGY CAN ABOUT

THE CONVERSION OF HUNDREDS OF SOULS AT A TIME. IT IS NOT MY PLACE TO SAY THAT THIS IS WRONG, CERTAINLY SOME PEOPLE HAVE BEEN CONVERTED IN A DRAMATIC FLOW OF EVENTS. BUT THE SCREAMING, HOWLING EVANGELIST SCARING HIS SINFUL LISTENERS TO DEATH, AND THE EMOTIONAL PITCH OF THE SAVING EXPERIENCE SIMPLY DON'T SEEM TO FIT PAUL'S CONCEPT OF A NEW CREATION.

IN THE N.T. TIME AND TIME AGAIN CONVERSION IS COMPARED TO BIRTH, YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN. SO LET&S USE THE METAPHOR THAT IS GIVEN. HUMAN BIRTH CERTAINLY IS NOT A SPASTIC AFFAIR! A SEED IS PLANTED AND A NEW LIFE BEGINS, SO TINY THAT FOR MONTHS THERE IS NOTHING THE EYE CAN SEE. THE NEW BEING IS NOURISHED AND GROWS EVER SO SLOWLY AND PERFECTLY AND AT THE PROPER TIME EMERGES INTO THE WORLD FRESH AND NEW, A NEW CREATION./ IS BIRTH ANY LESS DRAMATIC OR MIRACULOUS BECAUSE IT DOESN'T HAPPEN INSTAN* TANEOUSLY? ?

THE NEW BEING IN CHRIST OCCURS IN THE SAME MANNER/ A SEED IS PLANTED: PERHAPS BY A MINISTER, PERHAPS BY A FRIEND, OR WHEN READING ALONE, OR BY THE BEAUTY OF NATURE OR BY THE ULTIMATE REALIZATION THAT THERE IS MORE TO LIFE THAN DAY TO DAY EXPERIENCE. FROM THIS COMES INQUIRY AND KNOWLEDGE, A PARTICIPATION IN WORSHIP WITH FELLOW CHRISTIANS,/ THE RESULT IS A NEW PERSON ENTIRELY, A PERSON WHO IS NOW JOYFUL BECAUSE HE KNOWS THAT LIFE MEANS MORE THAN THE BOREDOM HE HAD EXPERIENCED: A PERSON WHO LOVES MORE BECAUSE

RECEIVE NEW INSIGHT AND KNOWLEDGE OF THE GOSPEL MESSAGE.

OUR TOPIC FOR THIS EVENING IS THE "BIBLE AS THE WORD OF GOD" BUT SO FAR WE'VE BEEN CONCERNED MAINLY WITH WHAT THE BIBLE IS NOT. AGAIN LET ME SAY THIS IS SOMETHING THAT MUST BE DONE: THE UNDER BRUSH MUST BE CUT AWAY TO GET DOWN TO THE RICH SOIL AND MANY TIMES OUR KNOWLEDGE OF A THING IS ENLARGED BY DISCOVERING WHAT IT IS NOT. I SINCERELY HOPE YOU AND THE REST OF THE CONGREGATION WILL MAKE PLAN TO ATTEND OUR MEETING NEXT WED. WHEN WE WILL DISCUSS THE TOPIC WITH YOU PUTTING FORTH OPINIONS AND QUESTION

IN CONCLUSION WE DO WELL TO RECOGNIZE THAT THE BIBLE AS THE WORD OF GOD IS JUST THAT. GOD SPEAKING TO US. IT IS THE WRITTEN RECORD BY MEN WHO HAVE WITNESSED GOD SPEAKING: IN THE CREATION OF THE EARTH, IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A CHOSEN PEOPLE AND ULTIMATELY IN THE CHRIST. AS SUCH THE SCRIPTURES ARE A STATEMENT OF FAITH BY EYE WITNESSES TRULY THE RECORD OF GOD SPEAKING TO MAN. WE DO NOT UNDERSTAND THIS, HOWEVER, BY MEMORIZING VERSES, OR BY HIDING BEHIND A SENTENCE HERE AND THERE THAT LIFTED OUT OF CONTEXT MEETS OUR PRESENT NEED. THE BIBLE DESERVES MORE THAN BLIND ACCEPTANCE, IT DESERVES STUDY AND INQUIRY. IT IS THE VERY BASIS OF OUR FAITH: OUR RESOURCE BOOK AND OUR RECORD WE MUST NOT IGNORE IT NOR TREAT IT UNJUSTLY. OUR MINDS MUST BE OPENLY PREPARED IF WE ARE TO HEAR IN IT — THE WORD OF GOD.

HE KNOWS AND HAS FELT THE LOVE OF A REDEEMER AND LORD. STEP BY STEP A NEW BEING EVOLVES OUT OF THE OLD, IS THIS ANY LESS REAL THAN AN ON THE SPOT SPASM OF EMOTION?

THIS IS THE UNCOMFORTABLE QUESTION WE MUST ASK AND ANSWER IN EXAMING OUR CHURCH AND OUR SELVES. IS THIS IS OUR CHURCH THE MANIFESTATION OF A NEW CREATION? ARE WE A COMMUNITY THAT HAS RESULTED FROM A NEWNESS IN EACH ONE? INDIVIDUALLY ARE WE NEW BEINGS BECAUSE OF CHRIST OUR LORD? IF CHRISTIANITY TO YOU MEANS ONLY BEING A MEMBER OF THIS CHURCH THAN YOU ARE NO BETTER OFF THAN PAUL'S OPPONENTS WHO DEMANDED CIRCUMCISION AS THE MARK OF A CHRISTIAN. CIRCUMCISION, CHURCH MEMBERSHIP IT IS NO DIFFERENT. WHAT IS OF IMPORTANCE IS THE EXISTENCE OF A NEW CREATION, (A NEW WAY OF LIVING AND BEING.)

YOUR CHURCH AND FAITH ARE SIMPLY NOT ITEMS IN AN ALREADY OVERCORWDED SCHEDULE. THEY ARE NOT TO BE WEIGHED OVER AND AGAINST THE P.T.A. AND THE LOCAL SERVICE CLUB. [THEY ARE YOUR LIFE.] BY JOINING THIS CHURCH YOU HAVE NOT JUST ADDED ANOTHER ACTIVITY, YOU HAVE COMMITTED YOURSELF TO A NEW LIFE. A NEW WAY OF LIVING THAT FLOWS ABOVE, BELOW AND THROUGH ALL THAT YOU DO.

THE QUESTION THE TEXT FOR THIS MORNING POSES AND THAT I NOW ASK YOU, IS THIS. IS THE DYER UNION CHURCH OF UTMOST IMPORTANCE IN YOUR LIFE? IS CHRISTIANITY A WAY OF LIVING, A NEW WAY OF LIVING FOR YOU OR IS IT JUST A SET OF IDEAS THAT EXIST

ONLY WITHIN THESE FOUR WALLS? DOES THE FACT THAT JESUS CHRIST ~~MXXX~~ HAS LIVED AND DIED AND RISEN AGAIN MEAN ANYTHING AT ALL/ OR IS IT JUST A BIT OF SUNDAY SCHOOL POETRY?/

I AM NOT PERSONALLY OFFENDED BY THE LACK OF ENTHUSIASM SHOWN IN THE PAST. I DON'T WANT ~~TXXXMXT~~ TO SEE THIS LITTLE CHURCH EXPAND AND BURST ITS SEAMS JUST TO BUILD MY EGO. IF THIS WERE MY AIM, OR ANY MINISTER'S FOR THAT MATTER, WE'D BE IN THE WRONG BUSINESS. THIS CHURCH IS NOT OFFERING A FORM OF ENTERTAINMENT TO COMPETE WITH HOLLYWOOD AND TELEVISION, THE PROGRAM WE ATTEMPT TO PERFORM IS NOT AN ALTERNATIVE FOR YOUR SPARE TIME./ IF IT IS NO MORE THAN THAT, IN YOUR MINDS, THAN WE MIGHT AS WELL CLOSE THE DOORS AND GO HOME. OUR PURPOSE IS TO EXTEND THE INVITATION AND TO HELP, IN ANY WAY POSSIBLE,/ YOU TO REALIZE THE NEW BEING,/THE NEW WAY OF LIFE THAT CAN BE YOURS IN JESUS CHRIST.

PERHAPS WE NEED A HELL FIRE AND BRIMSTONE EVANGELIST TO GET THIS ACROSS. I HOPE NOT. I ASK ONLY THAT YOU IN TURN ASK YOURSELVES THE QUESTIONS THAT HAVE BEEN POSED THIS MORNING. I AM NO EVANGELIST AND NEVER WILL BE AND I AM NOT ASKING YOU TO COME DOWN FRONT OR RAISE YOUR HAND AND BE SAVED. WHAT I ASK IS INFINITELY MORE DIFFICULT AND COMPLEX THAN THAT. AS WE PROGRESS THROUGH LENT I ASK THAT YOU THINK SERIOUSLY ABOUT THE QUESTION "AM I BORN AGAIN"? AM I A NEW BEING."? IN THE QUIET AND PRIVACY OF YOUR HOME I ASK YOU, IN THE FULL KNOWLEDGE THAT JESUS CHRIST DOES LIVE AND DOES OFFER A NEW CREATION TO ALL WHO WILL ACCEPT, TO PRAY TO ALMIGHTY GOD TOMAKE YOU A

PART OF IT. MAKE THE EFFORT REQUIRED TO PUSH EVERYTHING ASIDE MOMENTARILY, AND FACE YOURSELF WITH THE FACTS OF A DYING LORD, A RISEN CHRIST AND THE QUESTION "AM I BORN AGAIN." AM I PART OF A NEW CREATION?

AMEN